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AUTHOR Bushnell, Jay R.
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ABSTRACT

This literature review considers the theory and practice of retention efforts in higher education, with special focus on community college programs. Introductory material looks at the conditions (e.g., tighter budgets and decreased enrollments) that have brought the issues of attrition and retention to the forefront. The next section reviews studies of rates of retention, attempting to identify factors associated with high rates of attrition or persistence. Findings discussed here indicate that attrition is heaviest at the freshman level, and that most school withdrawals are voluntary in nature, with only 20-25% of students leaving for academic reasons. Next, models and theories of retention are reviewed, including models focusing on social integration, competing forces in students' lives, competency and commitment, and values added by educational experiences. After considering the design of campus-based research on retention, the paper reviews various definitions of successful retention. The next sections offer a summary of the literature concerning: successful retention and conditions promoting attrition; retention strategies for developmental programs; literacy issues; and the use of information on learning styles in program planning. Suggestions regarding the development of retention programs are offered, followed by a summary of the characteristics of successful programs, including the program at Miami-Dade Community college. A 52-item bibliography is included. (JMC)

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RETENTION AT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEVEL

Jay R. Bushnell

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Dr. James L. Wattenbarger
University of Florida
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RETENTION AT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEVEL

Jay R. Bushnell

EDA 7550 Higher Education Administration

University of Florida

Dr. James L. Wattenbarger

Nationally, the prosperity and growth of community colleges during the 1960's and early 1970's has been replaced by tighter budgets and decreased enrollments during the 1980's and early 1990's. There also does not seem to be any letup in the number of poorly prepared students applying to colleges. Faced with these conditions, educators in higher education have begun to turn to questions of retention. The hope is that successful retention strategies will provide a means of recruitment (Clagett, 1982), satisfy state accountability demands, improve student self-esteem and faculty morale (Ramirez, 1983), and develop effective learning theories and methods for dealing with developmental students. Increasingly, the practice of accepting a student's tuition or spending taxpayers' money without any realistic plan to service students is being questioned on ethical grounds (Bean, 1986).

From 1963 to 1975, there had been a 26% drop in birthrate. There has also been a decline in the traditional aged individuals choosing to go to college (Noel, 1985). This trend is projected to continue into the 1990's.

Moreover, the increased cost of a college education, a weak economy, and less confidence in the value of a degree, all complicate the functioning of colleges. Regional shifts will create unique problems (Thomas & Andes, 1987). Some, like Florida will be faced with too much growth, and others, like Massachusetts, will face underenrollment. Ironically, both states face budget crunches. To make matters worse, many state legislatures, faced with a decreased tax base, are beginning to tie funding for higher education to some accountable final product (Roueche, 1983).

Community colleges face a unique challenge with retention. The challege is that "the open door must be more than an admission statement" (Roueche & Pitman, 1972, p. 6). High risk students will continue to begin their college careers at community colleges. Faced with legislative demands for accountability, these colleges will have to design effective ways of developing these students. The era of the 'right to fail' will have to be replace by the 'right to succeed' described by so many authors (Cross, 1971, 1976, Maxwell, 1979, & Roueche & Pitman 1972). Of particular concern is the accusation that commuity colleges structurally restrict access to success in the broader society with their lower graduation rates. Astin (1975), a noted critic of community colleges, feels that decision makers must restructure community college programs so that graduation rates increase. As will be discussed later, the

problem with this train of thought is that it simplifies the problem and fails to consider the comprehensive mission of community colleges. Yet the perception is a common one and will continue to influence the discussion about retention at community colleges.

It may well be that community colleges will have to amend the comprehensive nature to their mission. Faced with less money, some community colleges will have to make priority decisions with programs. One would hope that those decisions would continue to support the spirit of democratic opportunity but administrators and faculty will face some hard choices about which programs to cut (Lenning, Sauer, & Beal, 1980).

Clearly, the question of retention poses a set of complex issues that go beyond simply measuring the percentage of students who get degrees or certificates. It is also clear that successful retention strategies reflect a campus wide commitment (Johnston, 1982) that focuses on the student needs from their first contact with the college. The most critical period for community college students is in the first six months (Lenning et al. 1980) with the first week being even more critcal for many.

Programs that have had the most success provide students with a challenging environment that develops self-esteem. The benefits of a college education are

stressed and the student is made to understand the competencies needed for success in college (Noel, 1985).

RATES OF RETENTION

In reviewing the literature on retention, one must pay close attention to the context of the type of college or program within a college. Retention rates tend to be lower in community colleges v. universities, public v. private, and liberal arts v. religious colleges (Cope, 1978). The highest retention rates are to be found in health technology and physical education programs and the lowest pass rates in science, math, and developmental programs. Introduction courses, PSI, and TV courses also are inclined to have lower rates of completion. Of note, off campus courses seem to have higher completion rates (Clagett, 1982) posing questions about the quality of either part-time faculty or the type of students that might enroll in these courses. Finally, one study found about a 45% attrition rate for both english and math (Hellmich, 1989).

Despite the differences with retention rates, there are some patterns that tend to generalize across colleges and programs. Attrition is heaviest at the freshmen level (Pascarella & Terenqini, 1980) and "public impressions to the contrary, the great bulk of student institutional departure is voluntary in character" (Tinto, 1985, p. 31) with only 20-25% having to leave for academic reasons.

Interestingly, even when they withdraw, students tend to finish the semester. Bers (1986) found that 70% completed the semester and then withdrew.

Since the 1880's, completion rates have consistently been around 55% for all of higher education (Bean, 1986, Cope, 1978, Rounds, 1984, & Tinto, 1982, 1985). Remarkably, this has not changed in recent times even though colleges have become more intrusive in trying to improve retention. Tinto (1982) warns that this raises serious cost effective questions and that there is a need to "...be much more conservative in our projections regarding our abilities to significantly reduce dropout in higher education at the national level". He feels that any major changes will require "...massive and far-reaching changes in higher education, changes that go beyond the mere surface restructuring and institutional differentiation that has marked past educational changes" (p.695). With restricted funds, one can't help wonder about the future of any major retention program.

The community college retention rate nationally ranges from 15-25% (Cope, 1978, Rendon & Mathews, 1989, and Tinto, 1985). There is some dispute as to whether students plan on transfering from community colleges. Tinto (1985) states that only 13% have plans on seeking a four year degree but Rendon & Mathews (1989) state that 75% declare transfer as a primary goal. Bers (1986) found that only 37% intended to

earn an AA degree or certificate, suggesting that a smaller percentage seek a BA. Many students drop out because they were not working on a degree and have achieved their objectives, transferred, were unsure of themselves, were not satisfied with the college, or had job conflicts (Clagett, 1982, & Johnston, 1982).

Attrition is a particular problem for blacks, Hispanics, and native Americans. The problem can be traced to the public school tracking systems. Despite the fact that minorities start at the same level in kindergarten, "...by the tenth grade, in California 48% of the blacks and 45% of Hispanics drop out of high school" (Renden & Mathews, 1989, p. 314). Those who succeed in enrolling at a community college often have expectations of earning an AA and transferring but the biggest percent have not completed. One study of Hispanics in six Southwest community colleges revealed this pattern. The past tracking of Hispanic students had not only inadequately prepared them academically, it also failed to teach them how to take charge of their education. These students revealed the classic symptoms of a developmental student. They did not take advantage of the service provided and they did not develop any close relations with the faculty or college (Renden & Mathews, 1989). Maxwell (1979) emphasizes that developmental students feel success in education is a matter

of luck. Ironically, for minorities their past experience of being tracked actually reflects bad luck.

USE OF THEORY IN RETENTION STUDIES

In looking at the question of retention, one needs theoretical postions from which to organize their study. Retention theories should be relative to programs, types of students, institutions, and reasons for leaving (Bean, 1986). These models may range from definitional distinctions to major philosophical commitments. For example, Tinto (1975) stresses the need to definitionally distinguish academic failure from voluntary withdrawal. Roueche and Pitman (1972) philosophically feel that "all students can learn-not just those who have previously demonstrated success" (p.20).

Several broad theoretic models are utilized as predictive instruments of retention. Tinto's model (1975) borrows for Durkheim's social integration theory combined with personality characteristics and societal pressures. In his model, the degree of social integration is factored with individual characteristics of attitudes and motivations, and outside variables, like either greater preceived rewards or life emergencies, to provide a base from which to understand and predict reasons for attrition/retention. Those students that are integrated into the campus would be expected to have a higher rate of

retention. Astin (1975) and Pascarella & Terenzini (1980) both substantiate the importance of integration in retention but personality characteristics and social pressures also play an important role.

Another theoretical model that shows promise for predicting and explaining retention/attrition would be Anderson's (1985) force field model. Borrowing from Lewin, Anderson suggests that retention focus on questions of competing forces in a student's life that either drive him to completion with a college education or force him to withdrawal. Clearly, students, like all humans, face pressures that affect directions they take in life.

Clagett (1982) describes a model that examines the student in terms of competency and commitment. Students with a high degree of commitment and competency to do college work would be expected to persist. Students with high ability but low institutional commitment might transfer or drop out. Of course, those with low ability and low commitment drop out and low ability and high commitment might persist until forced out.

A final model that offers a useful way to evaluate retention in ways other than just counting degrees or certificates is the value added theoretic concept. Since so many community college students do not intend to get a degree, the question becomes one of determining the value of their experience while taking classes. The model

stresses the importance of measuring favorable changes in attitudes or development of students (Belcher, 1987, & Noel, 1985). Noel (1985) even suggests that colleges may need to sell students on the idea that a college education offers more than an increased earning potential, especially since this may be less true today. The value added competencies, talents, and emotional growth for student become an important educational outcome, perhaps once again.

In using any one of these models, one has to recognize the limitations imposed, but each model helps look beyond the overemphasized raw data of how many actually complete a degree to the multiple reasons for students not finishing. Any valid retention/attrition analysis will quickly discover that students who leave should not always be equated to failure.

Tinto (1982) stresses that there is no grand theory that completely explains retention/attrition, including his own model. He suggests that further attention needs to deal with finances, factors of career development, differences in gender, minorities, or SES and the need for theoretical postions specifically addressing community colleges.

CAMPUS RESEARCH ON RETENTION

As has already been implied, when reviewing the literature on retention, it may be hard to generalize. Moore (1985) stresses this problem and calls for more

comparative studies. With that objective in mind, community colleges should include retention/attrition research as an ongoing part of the mission to improve the development of their students. In the "...spirit of becoming as good as possible instead of seeing what is wrong now" (Levitz & Noel, 1985, p.351), the emphasize should be on a positive, nonpunitive climate. Levitz and Noel (1985) go on to suggest that a retention/attrition study should define the retention characteristics of the campus, establish a baseline for measured gains, identify strengths, as well as weaknesses, provide administrative guidance and support of institutional change, assess effective programs for causes, and maintain a nonpunitive climate.

Start with a health check to determine attrition rates, reasons for dropping, and successful programs (Noel, 1978). Establish what students expect out of a college education and specifically out of their stay with your college. How do they feel about the college? Basically, one is looking for discrepancies of perceptions that would provide direction for improving retention, either by correcting institutional mistakes or by correcting student perceptions. The final goal of a retention research project would be to measure outcomes, expected or not, that would provide a measure of success or direction (Noel, 1978, & Levitz and Noel, 1985).

A retention index should determine within semester, semester to semester, year to year, and overall success rates (Clagett, 1982). Since the first semester is most critical, careful monitoring should be done after that semester by contacting students to determine the reasons for their dropping out. The research should seek to discover withdrawal patterns and then model intervention strategies (Levitz & Noel, 1985).

DEFINING SUCCESSFUL RETENTION

Perhaps the biggest problem facing community college retention programs is with the popular bias of defining retention in terms of an AA or AS degree or a qualified success with a certificate. This definition provides no margin for students leaving for legitimate reasons (Bean, 1986, Cope, 1978, & Moore & Carpenter, 1985) or that not all students want or need an AA degree. A definition of retention should "...distinguish dropout resulting from academic failure from that which is the outcome of voluntary withdrawal" (Tinto, 1975, p. 89). Tinto (1985) feels that the term dropout applies "...only to those forms of departure involving individuals who are unable to reasonably [sic] complete what they came to the institution to achieve" (p. 39). "Dropout occurs when the student leaves an institution before reaching his or her educational objectives" (Bean, 1986, p48). This definition echoes the

definition in Astin's 1975 study. Bean stresses that this includes transfers before completion, when the student planned to transfer. Since as many as two-thirds of the students transfer before earning a degree, a retention program should seek to determine the specific reasons why students transfer. If they leave before intended, it represents a retention problem. Often students in occupational programs leave when they find a job, perhaps reflecting one of the objectives of an occupational program (Clagett, 1982).

Clearly, there are a lot of reasons why students may decide, or need to leave a program that have nothing to do with anything the college did or did not do. The research problem is to determine reasons for a student leaving. When a student leaves because he/she is bored with the program, displeased with the institutions rules and regulations, or because the education does not represent a cost effect experience, this may represent attrition (Astin, 1975, Noel, 1985, & Tinto, 1975). But if they leave because they have accomplished their goals, it should not be considered by the college, legislatures, or society as a failure.

WHAT THE LITERATURE SUGGESTS ABOUT RETENTION/ATTRITION

Successful retention

Successful retention consist of a unique blend of characteristics that students bring into colleges, their sociological past, as well as characteristics of the college.

Individuals who accomplish their goals tend to have the academic ability, but the motivation and attitudinal factors seem to be more important. A desire to obtain a degree for personal or intellectual reasons, a career goal that requires a college education, enjoyment of learning, self-confidence, or an identification with college educated people provides a foundation for completion. A student may be able but he/she must be willing to succeed.

Sociological conditions may also contribute to differences among groups of students. Females seem to be more likely to withdraw because of conflicting role commitments. Males seem to be more motivated by grades, unlike females, who are more motivated by intrinsic rewards. Students from better school districts tend to do better because of the quality of their education and because, more importantly, their school environment reinforces higher aspirations.

Students from upper or middle socioeconomic families where the parents are better educated, urbane, and affluent tend to do better. These families often interact based on democratic, supportive, and high expectations principles that serve the student well in college (Anderson, 1985 Bean,

1986, Lenning et al. 1980, & Tinto, 1975). Of course, these students usually attend the better high schools where they take college prep courses that reinforce their parents high expectations (Bean, 1986).

For their part, colleges improve student retention by providing holistic interest and support for the student. The entire campus focuses on each student from a personal congratulations to being admitted, to a concerned faculty, administration, and staff throughout their stay (Anderson, 1985, & Lenning et al. 1980). Faculty who create quality interaction with students may provide the most important retention tools for success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980).

In short, persisters reflect a history of success with education. They are comfortible with themselves and the college environment and they expect to do well. They register on time, study more than those who dropout, are full-time, and have good reading skills. But interestingly, those with the highest level of self-confidence are also most likely to transfer before getting a degree. This is especially true when the academic quality on campus is low and not challenging. Those students with some uncertainity about themselves but still doing academically alright, tend to persist (Bers, 1986). Integration into the college seems to be equally important for persisters (Astin, 1975, & Tinto, 1975).

Specific conditions for attrition

What Roueche and Pittman stressed in 1972 is still true. It is "...hard to pinpoint the single, specific reason why a student leaves," rather, one has to look for trends or patterns (p. 10). One has to remember the reasons are varied and may be institution specific. While analyzing attrition, one should remember to apply some theoretical organization for understanding the trends at his/her institution.

Who are the students that drop before achieving their goals and what might they have in common? Students who do not have a declared major drop out at about the 62% rate compared to a 38% for those who have a major (Clagett, 1982, & Willner, 1982). Without a career goal students encounter trouble identifying with the curriculum. Since the courses have little personal relevance, students get bored. Of course, poor teaching aggravates the problem (Noel, 1985). Since having a major seems to be so important, students who change their majors, as 75% do, may find themselves in a potentially at risk transition period (Gordon, 1985, & Noel, 1985).

Communter students are much less likely to succeed, posing a special problem for most community colleges. The reasons for this are not clear. It may be due to lack of integration, differences of attitudes, aspirations or goals

(Pascarella, Duby, Miller, & Rasher, 1981). Astin (1975) suggests that the lack of integration is the primary problem. Lower SES students seem to be most affected by these factors (Astin, 1975, & Valverde, 1985). Tinto (1975) agrees but also adds that the association with peers who do not identify with a college education affects attrition. In his study, Bers (1986) questions the interaction theme but this disagreement may illustrate the problem of generalizability. Clearly, lower SES students tend to be first generation college students, to be from the poorer school districts, to be nonassertive, to have low self-esteem, and to lack career goals. In short, the college environment is foreign to them (Anderson, 1985, & Valverde, 1985) and they experience cultural shock.

Many of the students who fail to accomplish their goals do so because of outside pressures beyond their control. Actual problems with their homelife either prevent them from continuing or they have created a passive mode of adjusting to life. Of course, this passive mode prevents them from taking charge of their college education, even when they have the ability (Anderson, 1985, & Cross, 1971). For them procrasttination represents a strategy of life (Anderson, 1985). As many as 66% of the dropouts are self-supporting with the majority working more than 36 hours a week (Astin, 1975, & Johnston, 1982).

One of the many ironies of retention is that grades are most important to "those who have the hardest time getting them" (Cross, 1971, p. 43). The question is whether this is due to the lack of native abilities or skill deficiencies? Theoretically, any retention strategy would need to assume that most students can perform when properly prepared. Moore and Carpenter (1985) also caution not to assume that poor preparation is limited to lower SES or minorities. Clearly, many lack the basic skills and motivation to be successful in college. Perhaps as many as 20-25% read at or below the 4th grade level (Rounds, 1984). Most students have poor study strategies and rely on memorization. Furthermore, as many authors stress, students tend to resist developing more robust techniques (Boyer, 1987, Clagett, 1982, Dustin, 1983, Johnston, 1982, Maxwell, 1979, Moore & Carpenter, 1985, Rounds, 1984, & Tinto 1975, 1985). Grade inflation has trained these students to exert little effort. Ironically, as Maxwell (1979) stresses, "the failproof course has improved neither motivation nor learning" (p. 377). Open-access community colleges particularly face more of these students and have to make institutional adjustments (Hellmich, 1989).

Again, a major concern in higher education has been the problem of minority attrition. Blacks, Hispanics, and native Americans have the lowest rates of completion (Astin,1975, & Renden & Mathews, 1989). Ironically, a

commitment to an open-door community colleges may restrict access for minorities, at least in many of the urban inner city community colleges. According to Richardson and Bender (1987), a commitment in many urban community colleges to vocational education and to a social promotion system of grading contributes to a disportionate number of minorities who do not graduate with an AA degree or if they do earn an AA, they find themselves poorly prepared to compete at the university level. Part of the problem for minorities is the traditional university snobbery against community college programs but when community colleges fail to have acceptable quality standards, it is easy to see why universities are reluctant to accept these transfers.

Richardson & Bender (1987) stress that this is not true in all states. Florida with its well developed community college system has one of the best records of minority success in earning a BA. In Florida, seventy-six percent of the minorities who enter college start their careers in community college and they do very well when transferring into BA programs.

Unfortunately, the minority problem is further complicated by stereotypes about performance abilities and expectations. Administrators, faculty, and counselors often assume minorities require remediation, with some incorrectly placed (Valverde, 1985). Minorities are also affected by a tracking system that works with these stereotypic

assumptions, which in turn creates a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure. If they do graduate from high school, they tend to lack the skills needed for success in college.

Of course, minority lack of success in higher education also relates to the social environment created by their parents' prejudically defined life. Many reflect the early described characteristics of lower SES families. Poor motivation, lack of family support, financial problems, poor time management skills, poor academic skills and unrealistic expectations all contribute to poor retention (Renden & Mathews, 1989). The magnitude of the minority problem can be illustrated by the lack of success for minorities. Nationally, blacks increased their enrollments during the 1980's but had a decrease in retention, especially at traditional white colleges (Duston, 1983).

Since the largest percentage of minorities begin their college career in community colleges, the challenge will be to reverse the trend of high attrition rates. No small charge. Developmentally, the question becomes one of how to change a pattern developed over 12 years? Addressing the minority issue, Smith stresses, "...institutions must facilitate the achievement of the expectations placed on students". Standards of excellence are needed "...but the institutions themselves must also be willing to be measured for their ability to facilitate the achievement of those

standards" (Smith, 1987, p. 24). Need one add that this should apply to higher education generally?

Generally, high risk students lack social contacts on campus. Extracurricular activities might help but what seems most important is a significant relationship with a faculty member (Johnston, 1982, & Thomas & Andes, 1987). Financial problems seems to be most important for minorities and may be more of a factor for actually starting than persisting (Cope, 1978, & Nora & Horvath, 1987). Interestingly, administrations may need to be careful about over recruiting, even when aid is provided. Richardson & Bender (1987) suggest the "...'efficient' strategies for enrolling students in courses may contribute to low completion rates by discouraging or, at best, by failing to assist those who were interested in degree programs"(p.152). The zeal to get new recruits may not only ignore the needs of the students enrolled, it may also encourage marginally motivated students.

Finally, high risk students tend to lack self-confidence which is often revealed by only enrolling in one or two courses and enrolling late. As Bers states, they are "...the last in and the first out" (1986, p. 55).

GENERAL CONSIDERATION FOR RETENTION STRATEGIES

Developmental programs

A major concern for any successful retention strategy will continue to be focused on students who have poor academic skills (Cross, 1971, 1976, Maxwell, 1979 & Rounds, 1984). Clearly, a community college cannot be expected to correct "...deficiencies accumulated over twelve or more years of elementary and secondary schooling ..." in a single semester (Richardson, Fisk, & Okun 1983, p. 164). As might be expected, developmental education is a high-risk attrition area but students should be given every opportunity to succeed. Yet Richardson et al. (1983) stress that since taxpayers' monies are being used, there should be a specific time for students to show progress.

Believing that students should have already learned these skills, faculty often resist developmental programs. This may be true, but the fact remains that if colleges want to survive they have to work with what they get. On a positive note, there is great potential for discovery. Using the theoretical premise that most students can learn, the challenge is to develop techniques that work for these students. Clearly, this means going beyond the traditional blackboard/lecture format. In class research, as described by Cross and Angelo (1988), should be seen as an opportunity to build on learning theory. Community college faculty could become the role models for effective teaching. An added benefit for the faculty would be the vitality this reasearch would bring to their professional lives. Still,

overcoming the faculty resistence may present a major challenge for any college-wide developmental program (Richardson et al., 1984 & Rounds, 1984). Success would depend on how it is administered. Seeking volunteers and communicating the importance of the mission of developing all students provides the best approach. Forcing faculty to participate, represents the worst approach. Using only the very best faculty from all departments helps provide college integration (Richardson et al., 1983) and helps remove the stigma associated with teaching developmental courses.

A comprehensive assessment and placement system that is flexible should place students in college prep courses. Instructional techniques should be equally flexible and experimental. Faculty, counselors, and advisors should be carefully selected. Special in-service training in techniques for working with developmental students should be provided. Faculty need to provide clearly structured content, have high expectations, provide positive regard for all their students, demand student participation, and provide frequent and positive feedback. Finally, there should be a systematic formative program evaluation (Obler, 1983, Rounds, 1984, & Rameriz, 1983). It cannot be overemphasized that all this requires a total campus wide commitment.

Question of homogeneous-hetereogeneous grouping

Because of the range of abilities of students attending community colleges, a major issue will be how to handle those differences in the most benefical way. Research clearly indicates that homogeneous grouping does not work (Maxwell, 1979, & Oakes, 1985). Yet the problem remains of how to deal with students who read at the 4th grade level. Clearly, they should not be allowed into a class requiring reading proficiency for mastering content. For less severe deficiencies, students could be placed in regular classes that utilize cooperative learning as decribed by Kagan (1989), Johnson, Johnson & Holubec (1988), or Slavin (1986). Cooperative learning has been shown to improve academic performance of all students. It has also dramatically developed social interactional skills, skills which seem to be an important key to retention success. Students needing the most remediation should also be exposed to cooperative learning but not in the regular college credit courses where their academic deficiencies would create an obvious barrier to their success. Course prerequisites should be developed that address this problem (Richardson & Bender, 1987). Competency based education has been shown to be effective in dealing with developmental students (Rameriz, 1983) but Maxwell (1979) cautions against relying solely on the technique.

Question of literacy

Another area of special concern for retention programs is the question of literacy. Several authors warn that the central focus of a campus should be with critical reading skills (Obler, 1983, Roueche, 1983, Rounds, 1984, & Richardson et al., 1983). It seems self-evident that "the problem of the college student who enters with low reading scores extends into almost every area of his or her academic life" (Rounds, 1984, p.13). One study estimates that one-fifth of the students are "functionally incompetent" (Obler, 1983, p. 22), lacking reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. According to Richardson et al. (1983) "students acted as consumers of language rather than as authors or critics" (p.xii). They feel that information is presented as bits of information with no attempt to encourage students to analyze or synthesize, creating a condition where students do not develop critical literacy. There is a lack of traditional standards of literacy where students do a lot of writing with essay exams, reaction papers or term papers (Renden & Mathews, 1989, & Richardson, et al., 1983).

There is even a paradox for developmental students. In a good developmental program, these students are exposed to the techniques of critical literacy only to find that regular classes deemphasize those skills! Richardson et al., (1983) feel that by deemphasizing critical literacy, community college education has leveled down the quality of

higher education. Furthermore, because students are not learning critical literacy skills, they charge that, "open-access colleges like Oakwood (psuedo name of the community college in their study) may unwittingly be preparing students for slots in the lower strata of society from which they will not easily escape" (p.9).

Why has literacy been deemphasized? The answer can be found in student characteristics and administrative commitment to growth. Students are driving the curriculum. They resist critical literacy and successfully negotiate with the faculty. Some faculty have found it easier to give in to those negotiations and not appear to be hardnosed. Then with the administrative emphasis on growth by increased FTE and then growth with retention, without any campus commitment to excellence, faculty find themselves dealing with more poorly prepared and motivated students. Faculty adjust to the contradictory demands by detaching themselves from the process and lowering the standards. "...Instructors and students may jointly 'buy into' classes with low-level cognitive objective, lectures, and objective test" (Richardson et al., 1983, p. 18) Even when faculty point out the problem, growth minded administrators fail to heed the warnings. Of course, a detached adjustment really is a rationalization that does not speak kindly to the professionalism of the faculty. But it does underline the idea that community college systems do not always have the

ideal degree of faculty academic freedom. It should be stessed that in Richardson's et al. study, the faculty were much more concerned with developmental students than were administrators.

To improve literacy, administrators need to accept the idea that academic excellence is an equally important agenda. Not only is it important to improve retention, it is important to graduate students who have the needed critical literacy skills needed for employment and life (Richardson, et al. 1983).

Use of learning styles

The use of learning style inventories for dialogic advisement also shows promise for improving retention. Not only does it put the student in touch with their own styles, faculty learn to recognize the diversity in classes and then develop alternative delivery systems to accomodate the different styles. The emphasis would be to develop each student beyond their learning preference and in the process develop each student's total learning potential. The Myers-Briggs is used for such a purpose with high risk students at Ball State. Studies at Ball State indicate that high risk students preferred predictable structure with quick closure and clearly defined assignments (Valverde, 1985). An instructor could use this information to start where those students are and then introduce them to

techniques to develop other learning styles. Kolb (1984) maintains that complete development of all styles enhances the ability of an individual to learn and to develop fully as a human.

MOVE TOWARD A SOLUTION

Any at risk detection system should be careful not to be too precise due to the complicated blend of factors that affect retention. A college should also be careful in the way they market themselves. Quality programs should fit the needs of their student population. A postive climate on a campus where students are encouraged to interact with the faculty seems mandatory but this also requires a climate of positive interaction between all the campus players.

Retention solutions should be adapted to the unique characteristics of each college (Clagett, 1982). The more diverse the mission, the more diverse would be a retention strategy (Bean, 1986). A committee represented by all the campus players should be setup to assess administrative/faculty commitment, assess existing programs, delineate resources, determine retention characteristics, and set up a linking and reward network (Noel, 1978). Determining campus appeal, or why students select the college helps define retention directions. What seems most important here is to create a 'staying environment'. "Regardless of how sophisticated and comprehensive various

recruitment and retention strategies are, if the atmosphere of the institution is not a 'staying' environment, their impact will in the long run be minimal" (Noel, 1978, p. 96).

Determining what works and recognizing that the college may not be able to be all things to all people may be an important consideration (Levetz & Noel, 1985, Ramirez, 1983, & Richardson et al. 1983). Developing a clear communication system that provides timely information for students and faculty is a must (Gordon, 1985, & Lenning et al. 1980). Letting students know that the community of faculty, administrators, and staff have confidence in their ability to succeed and expect them to be successful should also be an important part of the communication (Johnston, 1982). Don't keep it a secret.

Recruitment should start with already enrolled students. By seeing to their needs, not only is their retention enhanced but they become ambassadors for the college. By concentrating on their needs, the college also better identifies the trends affecting the college (Noel, 1978). Recruitment should pay particular attention to the expectations of lower SES students because they tend to create potential problems with unrealistic goals. The college should seek to integrate them into appropriate programs that make success possible. This would also be true of academically unprepared students (Opp. 1986, & Valverde, 1985). Special attention should also be given to

undeclared majors, with orientation, advisment, and career planning (Gordon, 1985, & Opp, 1986).

Interestingly, Kingsborough Community College used a survey to not only determine characteristics of their dropouts, they used the survey opportunity to offer help with reenrolling and 42% took advantage of the offer (Willner, 1982). This supports the contention that showing an interest in the student works to motivate retention.

Once the characteristics of the student body have been determined, selective reruitment may prove to be a useful strategy (Bean, 1986, & Richarson et al., 1983). Of course, an open-door policy should be maintained, but the recruitment emphasis would be on what the college does best.

A retention program should be intrusive. Students need to feel that the college is concerned with their success and that those who want to continue are expected to succeed. This concern should be communicated throughout their stay but is most important the first semester and even with first contact, as already has been stressed (Noel, 1985, Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, & Tinto, 1982). Even semester breaks should be monitored with some form of contact that expresses concern for the student (Thomas & Andes, 1987).

A part of the intrusive system is to identify characteristics of at risk students that can be used as an action plan for retention. Of course, at all times the program should focus on success, however it may be defined

by the student. When possible the college should try to accommodate and correct attrition factors by identifying potential at risk students and by creating a college wide structure to facilitate their success.

An entrance screening procedure should identify known at risk characteristics. Since there is an inverse relationship between the income and the educational level of the students' parents and the students' retention, a determination of SES provides a good predictor. Coming from a small town background also puts students at risk. Even religion can provide clues. Students from Protestant background who do not have a religious preference are likely to dropout, unlike students how are declared Jews, who have the highest retention rates (Astin, 1975). High school grades and class ranks, as well as the quality of the high school also provide useful indicators (Astin, 1975, Clagett, 1982, & Cope, 1978). Even a students' self-assessment provides good indicators (Astin, 1975).

Academic dismissals, not suprisingly, exhibit lower academic skills (Tinto, 1975) and make-up about 20-25% of the withdrawals. ACT and SAT seem to provide some good indicators of academic attrition. Students with ACT composite scores of 26 or above or a combined SAT score of 1100 had only a 10% attrition rate during the freshman/sophomore year in one study. Community college students with ACT scores below 15 and SAT scores below 700

averaged 41% attrition (Noel, 1985, & Thomas & Andes, 1987). Clagett (1982) feels that past performance is more important that apptitude because it indicates how well motivated a student is. He recommends paying close attention to the grades during the first semester. Another measure of motivation and self-confidence could be determined by the number of classes studens sign up to take. Taking only one or two courses may indicate a problem. Equally important is whether they declare a major. If they work more than 20 hours a week, they are potentially at risk (Clagett, 1982, & Willner, 1982). Finally, a close watch should be made of minorities.

A computer early warning system should flag students who might be at risk or who are doing poorly during the semester. In either case, once flagged, the student would be required to seek advise or help from an elaborate support service. Noel (1978) suggest student contracting might be a useful tool here. One study found that such an intrusive system reduced attrition by 40% (Rounds, 1984). Prince George Community College uses what they call a 'drop back' technique for academic problems. Students having difficulty, drop back to a more basic level of the same course for remediation. Once that phase is successfully completed, they continue on with the regular course (Clagett, 1982). Support service with diagnostic testing/placement, course offerings suited to student

skills, counseling, advising, tutoring, monitoring, and recognition systems for success must be in place (Anderson, 1985, & Cellucci, 1986). Counselor support is especially important for a successful retention program (Rounds, 1984).

A valid placement system is crucial (Cellucci, 1986, Noel, 1978, & Smith, 1989). Mandatory placement, especially based on reading, is equally crucial (Richardson & Bendor, 1987, & McCabe & Skidmore, 1983). If not mandatory for all students, an orientation course should be required at least for students with undeclared majors (Gordon, 1985 & Noel, 1978). Vocational students should also be integrated into the overall college academic climate (Boyer, 1987). Class attendance should also be required (Hellmich, 1989, & McCabe, 1983).

Late registration should be eliminated. Class sizes should be kept small, allowing faculty to give more individualized instuction, especially for writing assignments. The use of part-time faculty should be minimized. Part-time faculty do not have the same commitment to the college and an overuse of them sends the message to the full-time faculty, 'anyone can do your job'. An overdependence on part-timers creates an added burden on full-time faculty for advisement.

The overall college commitment is to provide all students with a general education that prepares them for a variety of life-time careers. Since only 17% of the men and

31% of the women have a specific career selected when they come to college, career counseling has to be an important part of a retention program (Noel, 1985).

SUCCESSFUL RETENTION PROGRAMS

Successful programs have a campus wide group of people "...who have a mission, a burning desire, to help students become all that they can become" (Noel, 1985, p. 17-18). Student success is the motto (Valverde, 1985). Students discover that learning is an action process (Redding, 1990) and instructors let students take charge of their learning. Social interaction is integrated into intellectual development to construct a sense of community. The climate of expectations is neither too easy nor too difficult (Tinto, 1985). Students derive interaction support from their peers and faculty (Cope, 1978). Procedures for financial aid or any other bureaucratic interaction should be made user friendly (Nora & Horvath, 1989). Special attention is devoted to minority needs (Renden & Mathews, 1989). There is an action plan that is proactive (Lenning et al., 1980) and the program pays attention to detail.

One study found that successful retention programs with at least 50% retention rates, were found to have

> strong administrive support, mandatory assessment and placement, structured courses, multiple learning systems, volunteer instructors, use of peer tutors, monitoring of student behaviors, interfacing with

subsequent courses, and program evaluation (Roueche, 1983, pp.5-6).

To make this work, there seems to be a need to have two conditions, a sincere campus-wide concern for student retention and recognition that all campus environments contribute to retention success (Noel, 1978). This concern also has to include a meaningful articulation with the local high schools (Thomas & Andes, 1987).

Miami-Dade an example of success

Roueche and Baker, Access and Excellence, (1987) describe the program at Miami-Dade Community college. Miami-Dade, perhaps the most diverse community college, and certainly the largest, tackled the problem of retention. The aim has been to have access that requires excellence. They put into practice a system that mandated student responsibility for academic performance. Testing and placement was mandatory for all first time college students, those carrying nine hours or more and those signing up for math or English classes. They developed a monitoring system to back this demand up and they also provided a comprehensive student service network to assist students. The importance of excellence can be measure by the 13,000 suspensions during the first five years. More significantly, the rate of suspensions dramatically declined each year as the importance of student excellence took hold.

Each student recieved academic program reports and 93% polled said they appreciated the effort. The report allowed midcourse corrections when needed. Early intervention and assistance prevented 82% from getting into academic trouble. Furthermore, those who took advantage of the recommended assistance showed a .88 GPA increase, while those who did not declined another .44 (McCabe & Skidmore, 1983).

Miami-Dade, with its nationally recognized program (Roueche & Baker, 1987) represents the potential for correcting institutionally caused retention problems. Clearly, such an effort requires a major institutional commitment. It requires a climate that recognizes "...non-enrollment often represents a postive decision on the part of students-a change or upgrading of educational or vocational goals" (Willner, 1982, p. 62).

CONCLUSION

Retention has become one of the popular buzz words in higher education. The biggest problem with the concept is the restrictive traditional definition applied to defining success. The mind set is that a student who signs up for a college course must only be considered a success if they obtain a degree within a specified time period. For students attending community colleges, earning an AA degree within three years fits the traditional standards of

colleges. It also fails to recognize the personal agendas of the students. Even those who seek an AA degree, often do so on a part-time basis, clearly requiring more than the traditionally defined three years. In many ways, the traditional definition of retention rates reflects an unrealistic and perhaps, an ignorant understanding of the community college comprehensive mission and the types of students who attend.

The question of retention rates has to be institutionally specific. Each college has to be able to measure what expectations their students bring to the campus. Only then can the institution measure whether the college has been successful in meeting the needs of those students and only then would a college be able to make a significant determination of the college's retention rates.

For a better understanding of retention rates, colleges should utilize theoretical positions. Using the integrational, forcefield, competency/commitment, and value added theories helps provide a focus point for understanding the characteristics of students attending the college. Using these theories also helps provide a predictive model for identifying problem areas and then developing tailored programs that fit the needs of the students. It has to be remembered that retention programs dealing with high risk student must be flexible to best meet diverse needs.

No one program meets all retention needs.

There are major areas that most community colleges will have to carefully monitor and develop retention strategies. Nationally, minorities, lower SES, and developmental students will challenge successful retention programs.

Perhaps the most desturbing part of the retention issue is the fact that most educators have known what to do about the problem but college administrators have been more concerned with generating FTE. Successful retention for community colleges has to involve a total campus commitment for access with excellence. Mandatory testing, placement, and monitoring of student progress works. Miami-Dade offers the best object lesson.

Cooperative learning offers a great deal of promise for improving the academic performances of students. The dialogic use of learning style inventories can be effectively used in improving both teaching and learning. Faculty mentoring programs helps a student develop the all important association with the college. There are many potential methods for improving retention, it is just a matter of doing it with a positive climate that recognizes the importance of total positive institutional interaction with the student, from the student's first contact.

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